

VZCZCXRO8832  
RR RUEHPA  
DE RUEHAB #0935/01 2481649  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 051649Z SEP 07  
FM AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3491  
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE  
RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABIDJAN 000935

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR USAID/DCHA MLEMARGIE, AF/W - EPLUMB, PARIS FOR  
GD'ELIA, LONDON FOR RBELL,

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/03/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [UN](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS PLANNING IN COTE D'IVOIRE: WHO'S IN  
CHARGE?

REF: A. ABIDJAN 900

[1](#)B. ABIDJAN 906

[1](#)C. ABIDJAN 864

[1](#)D. ABIDJAN 909

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Cynthia Akuetteh for  
Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The composition and responsibilities of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), the main body responsible for organizing elections in Cote d'Ivoire, has been highly politicized and subject to contentious infighting since the crisis erupted in 2002. The CEI is composed of members of the political parties as well as representatives of the President of the Republic, key government ministries and the President of the National Assembly. It is responsible for the technical aspects of elections preparation (delivering ballots, setting up polling booths, etc.). More importantly, the CEI is responsible for two political tinderboxes: creating the new voters list and proposing to the government dates for the beginning of election campaigning and elections. The CEI's July 27 distribution of CDs containing the 2000 voters list to all political parties sparked complaints from the opposition coalition Rally of the Houphouetists for Democracy and Peace (RHDP) that the CDs were too difficult to operate and that they could not verify the 5.5 million names on the list in the three weeks allotted to them. While the CEI's composition and technical role are no longer subject to debate, its role in setting the date for elections and establishing the list of eligible voters is vulnerable to political maneuvering. While the opposition squabbles over the format of the 2000 voters list, the CEI's authority over the nontechnical issues remains politically vulnerable leaving the door open for President Gbagbo to push the country toward premature elections before full implementation of the Ouagadougou Political Accord (OPA). End Summary.

\*\*\*\*\*

Composition of the CEI

\*\*\*\*\*

[1](#)2. (C) The Independent Electoral Commission (CEI) is the main body responsible for organizing elections and its political composition and responsibilities have been highly politicized and subject to contentious infighting since Cote d'Ivoire's crisis erupted in 2002. Its composition and role were debated extensively at the peace talks in Linas-Marcoussis in January 2003 with follow-up at the Pretoria talks in 2005 and then again in Ouagadougou in 2007. (Note: The President's camp argued in Ouaga to make the National Institute for Statistics (INS), which is the main technical body responsible for statistics, the national census, and electoral registers and is dominated by the President's

Ivoirian Popular Front party (FPI), the sole body responsible for creating the voters list; the unarmed opposition and New Forces wanted the INS to be accountable to the multipartisan CEI. In the end, the FPI acquiesced and the CEI will supervise the work of the INS. End Note.)

13. (SBU) The CEI is comprised of a central committee and various regional and local level committees. The central committee is the prime decision making body, and as a confidence-building measure, all the major political parties have representative on the central committee; the local level committees mirror the political composition of the central committee. The central committee has one representative each from the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly (President Gbagbo's ruling FPI party), the President of the Economic and Social Council (FPI party); two representatives from the Bar (opposition parties) and the Council of Magistrates (FPI party); and one representative each from the Ministries of Security (FPI); Territorial Administration (FPI); Economy and Finance (independent); and Defense (FPI). (Note: The Ministries of Security and Territorial Administration were merged into the Ministry of Interior, led by Desire Tagro, a close Gbagbo aide and principal FPI interlocutor in Ouaga, in the March cabinet reshuffle. It is not yet clear whether the Ministry of Interior will have two seats or just one on the CEI. End Note). Only the representatives of the parties that were signatories to the Linas Marcoussis Agreement (LMA) and the representatives of the President of the Republic and the President of the National Assembly have voting rights. This voting group elects the President of the CEI (current president is from the Democratic Party of Cote d'Ivoire (PDCI)) as well as the two Vice Presidents (who are currently from the Assembly of the Republicans (RDR) and the New

ABIDJAN 00000935 002 OF 003

Forces). The fact that only a limited number of members have voting rights dilutes the influence of the large number of members and sympathizers of the President's FPI party on the central committee.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Who Sets the Date for Elections?  
\*\*\*\*\*

14. (C) The OPA provides that the CEI's primary role is to organize elections by supervising its technical aspects (setting up polling booths, creating the ballots, etc.). More importantly, the CEI is responsible for two political tinderboxes: the creation of the new voters list and setting the election date. According to Ivoirian law, the CEI should propose to the government dates for elections and the opening of the electoral campaign. Opposition party Union for Democracy and Peace in Cote d'Ivoire (UDPCI) Secretary General Salif Ndiaye emphasized to Poloffs August 24 the importance the political opposition places on the CEI's role in the successful implementation of the OPA. Ndiaye underlined that it is the CEI that should indicate when the country is ready for elections and propose a date. "Gbagbo," Ndiaye said, "can't say when elections will be" (reftel A).

15. (C) CEI President Robert Mambe told Poloff August 29 that the CEI cannot provide a date for elections at this time since key OPA benchmarks have not yet been met. However, Mambe has repeatedly told the press, the UN peacekeeping mission (ONUCI), and the opposition political parties that elections cannot be held for 10 to 12 months after the completion of the audiences foraines and the identification process. Aside from the technical and highly contentious political issue of supervising the INS' efforts to establish the voters list, Mambe told Poloff that the CEI will propose a date for elections to the government depending on the development of the situation on the ground and once the audiences foraines are well underway. He said that elections cannot be held until the audiences foraines are underway; destroyed public records have been reconstituted; a new voter

registry list is created based on the identification process; the Integrated Command Center is up and running (the ICC under the OPA is mandated to provide security for the elections); the militias have been demobilized; and the government's civil administration including prefects and subprefects as well as previously elected mayors are in place throughout the country. (Note: At an August 30 briefing for the diplomatic corps by ONUCI, a Licorne representative noted that 60 percent of the civil administration is now in place in the North. End Note.). Mambe told Poloff that the Prime Minister has promised that all of these steps will be conducted properly and has said that all Ivoirians need to have identity documents in order for elections to be held.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Election Certification and Working with ONUCI Elections  
Certification Cell  
\*\*\*\*\*

¶6. (C) Since the CEI's responsibilities are mainly confined to elections preparations (proposing a date for elections, publishing an accurate and politically acceptable voters list, distributing voter cards, and setting up election infrastructure) and political confidence building (to give the various political actors a stake in the elections process) it has no legal or political authority to certify the elections. It has no decision-making authority once elections take place or in the event that there is a dispute amongst the parties as to the validity of the elections result; that responsibility falls on the Constitutional Council. The Constitutional Council is composed of seven members, not all of whom are legal or constitutional experts, but who are all Gbagbo-appointees. The political opposition is concerned about the objectivity of the Council. Mambe warned that ONUCI needs "intellectually capable" and "incorruptible" staff in its elections certification cell and must start work immediately in order to be in country to observe the audiences foraines. It is interesting that Mambe refrained from criticizing the international community for eliminating the High Representative for Elections (HRE) position in his August 29 meeting with Poloff, even though he had publicly and privately in earlier meetings with Emboffs called for keeping the position.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Status of CEI Election Planning; Working with Political  
Parties  
\*\*\*\*\*

ABIDJAN 00000935 003 OF 003

¶7. (C) CEI President Mambe explained to Poloff that the CEI is currently preparing for elections by conducting training and addressing technical issues and that they have set up their local cells. On July 27 CEI, in the presence of the INS, distributed CDs with the 2000 voter list to the major political parties. Mambe noted to Poloff that the CEI was under no obligation to distribute the 2000 list to the political parties. The CEI also distributed the list August 13 to its partners: UNDP, the Commission for the Supervision of Identification (CNSI), ONUCI electoral division, the National Press Council (CNP) and the Ivoirian Observatory for Press Freedom and Ethics (OLPED). The list contains the names of 5.5 million registered voters. According to Mambe, the 2000 list represents only 55% of Ivoirians who are currently eligible to vote and noted that elections cannot be held with only half the population participating.

¶8. (C) According to press reports, shortly after receiving the voters list, the coalition RHDP parties complained that the CDs were difficult to operate and that they were given only three weeks to verify the list. The press wrote that RDR Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs Ahmadou Soumahoro complained that the CD was not usable because parties cannot edit the list. Soumahoro reportedly called the handling of the voters list a "prelude to confusion" and

predicted an "opaqueness" in the management of the voters list. Mambe noted to Poloff that hard copies were too bulky and time consuming to print (Mambe said it takes 40 minutes to print one hard copy of the 2000 voter list).

19. (C) Comment: While the CEI's composition and technical role are no longer subject to debate, its role in setting the date for elections and establishing the eligible voters list is vulnerable to political maneuvering. Given the CEI's makeup, if political parties become engaged in a protracted battle over when it is appropriate to hold elections, the CEI is vulnerable to partisan bickering as the opposition political parties and the President's cronies on the CEI central committee face off. The CEI president continues to express confidence in the Prime Minister and his intention to maintain the CEI's independence, but the speculation on the date of the elections, sparked by Gbagbo's pre-independence day speech (reftel C) has clearly strained the appearance that the CEI maintains control over this debate. Mambe's pronouncement that elections cannot be held for 10-12 months after the audiences foraines and identification is widely accepted by the opposition political parties, ONUCI, and the umbrella of technical organizations that the Prime Minister oversees and which organize the elections and identification process (reftel D). However, the President's camp continues to push forward an optimistic view that elections can be held quickly (reftel C) and can be expected to use its non-voting members on the CEI plus the President's "bully pulpit" to press the point. It remains to be seen if Mambe and the CEI are losing ground in the fight to organize elections independently. But it is clear that the CEI does not have the final word and the date of the elections is vulnerable to political machinations, particularly by the President's camp.

End Comment.

AKUETTEH